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OXFORD PASS SCHOOLS.

'GREATS.'

AFTER the triumph of having at last actually passed 'Mods' (see *Chambers's Journal*, 14th May 1887) has a little subsided, our typical undergraduate, already in his third year, sees quite new prospects opening before him. That long and verdant path, strewn with roses, which awaited his willing steps after 'Smalls,' has now become a thing of the past; few and evil are his remaining days at Oxford: like Macbeth's witches, when he stirs his caldron, he perceives in it only 'Double, double toil and trouble.' As long as Mods occupied his gaze, the hugeness of the obstacle filled his horizon, and prevented him from looking beyond; but now that it is removed, he suddenly and to his amazement perceives that while on the one hand the greater part of his life at the 'varsity is over, on the other the major portion of his work there has still to be performed. Poor creature! He had imagined that when once Mods was passed most of his labours would be finished. On the contrary, he finds that they had little more than begun. He is now the proud possessor of two *testamurs*; but three more must be his ere he can claim that magic B.A. degree which does for a 'varsity man what the stamp of the royal mint effects for a sovereign.

Until two years ago, indeed, one more trial remained which had to be undergone by all alike—by the professional 'pot-hunter'—that is, the constant seeker after university rewards and aids to learning, who commences his career by getting a scholarship at Balliol, and finishes it by landing the Craven; and by the humble denizen of 'Teddy Hall' or 'The Tavern,' who considers six years a very reasonable time to consume in attaining to the status of a Bachelor of Arts. Appropriately to the history and destination of man, this meeting-place of manifold intelligences was theological, not to say polemical, in its character. Theoretically, it constituted one of the two

great divisions of the Second Public Examination; practically, it was the slightest and easiest of all Oxford schools.

Although the hand of change has laid its ruthless clutch upon 'Rudiments,' or 'Pass Divinity,' as it was indifferently termed, inasmuch that since 1886 it has ranked merely as one amongst the many pass schools out of which the Passman can select the fatal three, it is still worth while to dwell for a moment upon its departed glories, before they vanish for ever into the limbo of a forgotten past.

The time required to prepare for this tremendous ordeal used to be differently estimated. A *testamur* in Moderations having been actually secured, it becomes the painful task of the being whose fortunes we follow to prepare himself for his other three pass schools. It is to be noted that he is no longer the lighthearted mortal he was of yore; a change has come over the spirit of the scene, and the realities of existence have begun to press heavily upon him. The Oxford dun, like Pale Death himself, knocks impartially at the doors of the rich—who have exceeded their allowance—as well as at those of the poor. All the extravagances of former days are now beginning to bear their acrid fruit; every post brings a bill; every knock may announce the appearance of a furious creditor. Bad enough it often is for the comparatively wealthy; but for the poor! Who can describe the agony of the ruined man, who feels that the whole of his previous history is one long record of waste—waste of time, waste of opportunity, waste of life! Too often he has the additional pain of knowing that he has destroyed by his mad prodigality the very home that nourished him. Parents and sisters are impoverished; he himself is compelled to expiate by a lifetime of drudgery and indigence the drivelling idiocy of his earlier years. It is evident that to such a man as this, to obtain his Degree is often almost literally a question of life or death. If he succeed, there are possibilities which may serve in some measure to mitigate the punishment

he has brought upon himself. If he fail—but here we cannot follow him—'tis too bitter! Enough has been told to show that the Passman is likely to toil for his Finals in a fashion very different from that which he formerly pursued. He palter no longer; all he can do he does, but, unfortunately, that is not very much. He infinitely desires now, probably, to 'get through' with all possible speed; but he is informed that he has at present no chance of success. By far the most difficult of the fences he has still to negotiate is Pass Greats. This school may be considered as representative in some sort of the old 'Great Go,' a kind of relic of, or survival from, a former state of things: 'The last rose of summer left blooming alone.' It is indeed at once the most venerable and the stiffest of all Oxford Pass Exams, perhaps the only one which may be said to really demand some little exercise of the higher intellectual faculties. It is now that the Passman (as a rule) gets his sole glimpse into the upper regions of education. From the foot of the mountain he, as it were, looks up, and sees peak after peak piled high above him, each more inaccessible than the last. With awe he gazes, and at last turns away, feeling that 'the quest is not for him.'

At this point in their progress many men bid a long farewell to the classical pursuits which have occupied so many of their previous years. If they enter the Church, or if they attempt tuition, it is true that their classics will still be of service to them; and if they read for the bar—which comparatively few Passmen do—or become articled to a solicitor, it is possible that such Latinity as they possess may be turned to account. But, with these exceptions, it is probable that very few non-honour men, when once they have obtained a *testamur* in 'No. 1 Group A,' ever again make the slightest use of the lore which they have acquired at the cost of so many weary hours, and of cash to an amount which is known to Paterfamilias alone.

His two remaining schools the Passman can elect out of a number which it is open to him to attempt; but as several of these are mathematical or scientific in their character—and therefore, of course, to be shunned like the plague—his power of picking and choosing is practically considerably restricted. The historical schools—English or modern European—are a frequent choice; and perhaps the greatest difficulty to be encountered in connection with them is the essay which has to be written during the exam. upon some subject of general interest discovered by the examiners. To indite a brief disquisition on, for example, 'Fairy Tales' or the 'British Constitution' may not seem a very stupendous feat to a man who has ever accustomed himself to use his pen and his brains—even though but one hour be allowed for the deed—but it is an almost impossible performance to a being who has never thought consecutively for so long a period before, and whose habitual language is a slang dialect, which, however forcible and expressive, is not adapted to literary purposes.

Thus, then, we have traced the steps of our hero from the moment when, as an unfledged—or at least 'unplucked'—nestling he entered the arena of the schools to bear away the crown

of victory from 'Smalls,' to the time when he has won his last *testamur* in Final Schools. One more scene still remains, in which we may take a glance at him before we bid him adieu for ever. It is a 'Degree day,' and the *apodyterium* of the Convocation House is thronged with young men, clad for the last time in undergraduate apparel. Within are to be seen seated many of the relatives of the aforesaid—principally ladies—who have come to see dear Tom, or Dick, or Harry take his B.A. Tom, Dick, and Co. have to wait in the outer portion of the building until they have all exhibited their bundles of hardly earned *testamurs*, paid the required cash, and inscribed their names in the university register. Each of the batches of men from the several colleges is presided over by a sort of sponsor, in the shape of a Fellow or Tutor from the same Society, whose duty it is to warrant the respectability and genuineness of his *protégés*.

As soon as the necessary preliminaries have been observed, the latter find seats for themselves—or at anyrate endeavour to do so—in the interior, and there become spectators of events. It cannot be said that the externals of the affair are very striking; in fact they might be described as a trifle dingy; but notwithstanding, there is not wanting a certain amount of impressiveness. The Degrees in the 'superior faculties'—namely, in Law, Medicine, and Divinity—are first conferred, that is, if there happen to be any candidates for the same—and then those in Arts; men who are about to become M.A.s naturally taking precedence of their juniors. In each case, though the formula recited varies, the proceedings accompanying it bear a strong family resemblance. The recipients of the Degree are introduced by some responsible authority to the notice of the Vice-chancellor, who sits in a chair on a sort of dais at the end of the chamber, and whose business consists in taking off and replacing his cap and in indulging in the prescribed Latin orations. At the conclusion of each such ceremony, the newly-made graduates retire to robe themselves in their appropriate vesture, and then reappear to make their bow to the 'Vice.' These Oxford garments are rather 'seedy'-looking articles, their prevailing black being usually only relieved by the colour of the hood. The gown of a D.D., however, is truly gorgeous to behold, and when seen suspended in a shop-window, is calculated to fill little girls with an awful respect. As the new Doctor of Divinity, clad from head to foot in black and scarlet, proudly displays his splendour to the public view, he vividly recalls the description of the serpent before the Fall given by a Sunday-school boy in reply to a young lady anxious to ascertain if her lessons had borne any fruit: 'If you please, 'm, you said he were a very 'andsome hanimal.'

We are keeping the would-be B.A.s waiting all this time; but, as this is exactly their actual fate, there is no harm done. When at last their turn comes, the names of the men of each college are read out separately, and an extraordinary phenomenon is then witnessed. The two proctors, who are stationed near the Vice-cancellarial chair, start forward, as if suddenly galvanised into movement, and precipitate themselves in a highly alarming manner upon the

narrow path which serves as a thoroughfare, apparently having just discovered some delinquent of whom they are going in chase. They seem to find out they have made a mistake, however, by the time they have got half-way down the room, for they stop with a jerk, turn round, and return to their former position. This strange piece of eccentricity on the part of these high disciplinary officials is due to an old custom, which allows any unsatisfied creditor to 'pluck' the gown of the proctor when he hears the name of his hapless debtor, and thus arrest the bestowal of a Degree until his claims have been satisfied. Probably 'the oldest inhabitant' would fail to recollect an instance of this right being exercised; but Oxford is a place where old customs long survive, and even after credit and its corollary, debt, have both been abolished by an enlightened legislature, we may look to see this one still perpetuated.

As their names are uttered, the contingent of youths from University or Balliol, or Merton or Exeter, stumble forward with much banging and shuffling, for, though there may be much learning, there is little space in the Convocation House. When they are drawn up in front of the 'Vice,' the Don, who is acting godfather, discharges his function by a slight bow, and perhaps a wave of his hand, as much as to say, 'There is no deception here, gentlemen;' and then the men for whom he vouches immediately give way to those from other colleges. When all have in turn been presented to the Vice, the latter gets up and unburdens himself of some remarks (in Latin), which he seems to have been longing to make. Then the new 'Bachelors of Arts' retire once more to the antechamber, and there abandon themselves to the 'pleasing pain' of putting on the *toga virilis*, and at the same instant disburdening coin right and left, here, there, and everywhere at once. All the vulture-like hangers-on of a college, scouts, porters, sub-porters, common-room-men, even the proctor's bulldogs, will audaciously demand tips, with much the same cool impudence, one would think, as the highwayman who in the good old times politely requested people to give him their money or their life. In one respect, the plight of the victim is even worse, for to him no alternative is allowed; to refuse is impossible: it is regular plundering, from which he is fortunate if he escape still in possession of funds enough to take him down.

And now that the play is at last fairly played out and the game is over, it may occur to some inquiring mind to wonder whether it was worth the candle. What has the fortunate graduate in truth gained in return for all the time and all the money he has spent in pursuit of his Degree? In the first place, it should be said that any words which may seem to have been spoken disparagingly of Oxford life and Oxford opportunities have been aimed against not the use but the abuse of these. It must be remembered that not above one-half of the undergraduates of the present day are Passmen; and of them many are far superior to the 'average specimen' whose typical character we have endeavoured to sketch. Still, it may be doubted whether, with the exception of men who intend to take holy orders, or again of men who intend to do nothing at all, it is, strictly speaking,

worth anybody's while to take a Pass Degree. Those who really make their 'varsity career' a paying thing are the scholars, who afterwards develop into Fellows of their colleges. These are the men who win the prizes in the Oxford lottery; but it does not quite follow that all the rest of the tickets are blanks.

To take the lowest kind of benefit obtained—some amount of worldly experience must at least be secured. But further than this, it may be said that though it is certainly possible for men, as hundreds annually prove, to leave the university as essentially unlettered as they were when they came up, after all the achievement is a remarkable one. For those who have either eyes to see or ears to hear, there is an education apart from the schools. Culture and refinement are in the air; it is a man's own fault if he do not imbibe them. There is no other spot in Britain, perhaps in the world, where the past, the present, and the future are more closely united than they are here. All that activity of modern thought, all that movement of mind, which tend to produce results until now indefinable, here find fullest scope; for Oxford is no longer an oasis of Conservatism planted amidst a wilderness of change. It is a place keenly susceptible of impressions from without, and of which the pulse keeps true time with the heart of England. But there ever exists in the background the far-reaching influence of a thousand years, filled with imperishable memories, and indissolubly connected with events that are yet to come. The Past lives on at Oxford, dim and shadowy, it may be, but potent none the less; the very stones are historic. Ill befall the wretch who can find no good thing to say of the oldest and noblest of English homes of learning! Let a man set himself resolutely to draw out the good, and not the evil, from his surroundings, to lead the higher not the lower life which is there offered him, and—even though his name figure in no class lists—it will be hard indeed if he bear not away with him that which will raise him in the scale of being for the rest of his days.

THIS MORTAL COIL.

CHAPTER LII.—THE TANGLE RESOLVES ITSELF.

'You must never, never take it, Elsie,' Warren said earnestly, as Elsie laid down the paper once more and wiped a tear from her eye nervously. 'It came to him through that poor broken-hearted little woman, you know. He should never have married her; he should never have owned it. It was never truly or honestly his, and therefore it isn't yours by right. I couldn't bear, myself, to touch a single penny of it.'

Elsie looked up at him with a twitching face. 'Do you make that a condition, Warren?' she asked, all tremulous.

Warren paused and hesitated, irresolute, for a moment. 'Do I make it a condition?' he answered slowly. 'My darling, how can I possibly talk of making conditions or bargains with you? But I could never bear to think that wife of mine would touch one penny of that ill-gotten money.'

'Warren,' Elsie said, in a very soft voice—they were alone in the room and they talked like lovers—'I said to myself more than once in the old, old

days—after all that was past and done for ever, you know, dear—I said to myself: “I would never marry any man now, not even if I loved him—loved him truly—unless I had money of my own to bring him.” And when I began to know I was getting to love you—when I couldn’t any longer conceal from myself the truth that your tenderness and your devotion had made me love you against my will—I said to myself again, more firmly than ever: “I will never let him take me thus penniless. I will never burden him with one more mouth to feed, one more person to house and clothe and supply, one more life to toil and moil and slave for. Even as it is, he can’t pursue his art as he ought to pursue it; he can’t give free play to his genius as his genius demands, because he has to turn aside from his own noble and exquisite ideals to suit the market and to earn money. I won’t any further shackle his arm. I won’t any further cramp his hand—his hand that should be free as the air to pursue unhampered his own grand and beautiful calling. I will never marry him unless I can bring him at least enough to support myself upon.”—And just the other day, you remember, Warren—that day at San Remo when I admitted at last what I had known so long without ever admitting it, that I loved you better than life itself—I said to you still: “I am yours—at heart. But I can’t be yours really for a long time yet. No matter why. I shall be yours still in myself, for all that.”—Well, I’ll tell you now why I said those words.—Even then, darling, I felt I could never marry you penniless.’

She paused, and looked up at him with an earnest look in her true gray eyes, those exquisite eyes of hers that no lover could see without an intense thrill through his inmost being. Warren thrilled in response, and wondered what could next be coming. ‘And you’re going to tell me, Elsie,’ he said with a sigh, ‘that you can’t marry me unless you feel free to accept Whitestrand?’

Elsie laid her head with womanly confidence on his strong shoulder. ‘I’m going to tell you, darling,’ she answered, with a sudden outburst of unchecked emotion, ‘that I’ll marry you now, Whitestrand or no Whitestrand. I’ll do as you wish in this and in everything. I love you so dearly to-day, Warren, that I can even burden you with myself, if you wish it: I can throw myself upon you without reserve: I can take back all I ever thought or said, and be happy anywhere, if only you’ll have me, and make me your wife, and love me always as I myself love you. I want nothing that ever was his; I only want to be yours, Warren.’

Nevertheless, Mr Alfred Heberden did within one week of that date duly proceed in proper form to prove the claim of Elsie Challoner, of 128 Bletchingley Road, in the parish of Kensington, spinster, of no occupation, to the intestate estate of Hugh Massinger, Esquire, deceased, of Whitestrand Hall, in the county of Suffolk.

The fact is, an estate, however acquired, must needs belong to somebody somewhere; and since either Elsie must take it herself, or let some other person with a worse claim endeavour to obtain it, Warren and she decided, upon further consideration, that it would be better for her to dispense the revenues of Whitestrand for the public good, than

to let them fall by default into the greedy clutches of the enterprising pawnbroker in the Borough Road, or be swallowed up for his own advantage by any similar absorbent medium elsewhere. From the very first, indeed, they were both firmly determined never to spend one shilling of the estate upon their own pleasures or their own necessities. But if wealth is to be dispensed in doing good at all, it is best that intelligent and single-hearted people should so dispense it, rather than leave it to the tender mercies of that amiable but somewhat indefinite institution, the Court of Chancery. Warren and Elsie decided, therefore, at last to prosecute their legal claim, regarding themselves as trustees for the needy or helpless of Great Britain generally, and to sell the estate, when once obtained, for the first cash price offered, investing the sum in consols in their own names, as a virtual trust-fund, to be employed by themselves for such special purposes as seemed best to both in the free exercise of their own full and unfettered discretion. So Mr Alfred Heberden’s advertisement bore good fruit in due season; and Elsie did at last, in name at least, inherit the manor and estate of Whitestrand.

But neither of them touched one penny of the blood-money. They kept it all apart as a sacred fund, to be used only in the best way they knew for the objects that Winifred in her highest moods might most have approved of.

And this, as Elsie justly remarked, was really the very best possible arrangement. To be sure, she no longer felt that shy old feeling against coming to Warren unprovided and penniless. She was content now, as a wife should be, to trust herself implicitly and entirely to her husband’s hands. Warren’s art of late had every day been more sought after by those who hold in their laps the absolute disposal of the world’s wealth, and there was far less fear than formerly that the cares of a household would entail on him the miserable and degrading necessity for lowering his own artistic standard to meet the inferior wishes and tastes of possible purchasers, with their vulgar ideals. But it was also something for each of them to feel that the other had thus been seriously tried by the final test of this world’s gold—tried in actual practice and not found wanting. Few pass through that sordid crucible unscathed: those that do are of the purest metal.

On the very day when Warren and Elsie finally fixed the date for their approaching wedding, the calm and happy little bride-elect came in with first tidings of the accomplished arrangement, all tremors and blushes, to her faithful Edie. To her great chagrin, however, her future sister-in-law received the news of this proximate family event with an absolute minimum of surprise or excitement. ‘You don’t seem to be in the least astonished, dear,’ Elsie cried, somewhat piqued at her cool reception. ‘Why, anybody’d say, to see the way you take it, you’d known it all a clear twelvemonth ago!’

‘So I did, my child—all except the mere trifling detail of the date,’ Edie answered at once with prompt common-sense, and an arch look from under her dark eyebrows. ‘In fact I arranged it all myself most satisfactorily beforehand. But what I was really thinking of just now was simply

this—why shouldn't one cake do duty for both at once, Elsie?

'For both at once, Edie? For me and Warren? Why, of course, one cake always does do for bride and bridegroom together, doesn't it? I never heard of anybody having a couple, darling.'

'What a sweet little silly you are, you dear old goose, you! Are you two the only marriageable people in the universe, then? I didn't mean for you and Warren at all, of course; I meant for you and myself, stupid.'

'You and myself!' Elsie echoed, bewildered. 'You and myself, did you say, Edie?'

'Why, yes, you dear old blind bat, you,' Edie went on placidly, with an abstracted air; 'we might get them both over the same day, I think seriously: kill two weddings, so to speak, with one parson. They're such a terrible nuisance in a house always.'

'Two weddings, my dear Edie?' Elsie cried in surprise. 'Why, what on earth are you ever talking about? I don't understand you.'

'Well, Mr Hatherley's a very good critic,' Edie answered with a twinkle: 'he's generally admitted to have excellent taste; and he ventured the other day on a critical opinion in my presence which did honour at once to the acuteness of his perceptions and the soundness and depth of his aesthetic judgment. He told me to my face, with the utmost gravity, I was the very sweetest and prettiest girl in all England.'

'And what did you say to that, Edie?' Elsie asked, amused, with some dawning perception of the real meaning of this queer badinage.

'I told him, my dear, I'd always considered him the ablest and best of living authorities on artistic matters, and that it would ill become my native modesty to differ from his opinion on such an important question, in which, perhaps, that native modesty itself might unduly bias me to an incorrect judgment in the opposite direction. So then he enforced his critical view in a practical way by promptly kissing me.'

'And you didn't object?'

'On the contrary, my child, I rather liked it than otherwise.'

'After which?'

'After which he proceeded to review his own character and prospects in a depreciatory way, that led me gravely to doubt the accuracy of his judgment in that respect; and he finished up at last by laying those very objects he had just been depreciating, his hand and heart, at the foot of the throne, metaphorically speaking, for the sweetest girl in all England to do as she liked—accept or reject them.'

'And the sweetest girl in all England?'—Elsie asked, smiling.

'Unconditionally accepted with the most pleasing promptitude.—You see, my dear, it'll be such a splendid thing for Warren, when he sets up house, to have an influential art-critic bound over, as it were, not to speak evil against him, by being converted beforehand into his own brother-in-law.—Besides which, you know, I happen, Elsie, to be ever so much in love with him.'

'That's a good thing, Edie.'

'My child, I consider it such an extremely good thing that I ran up-stairs at once and had

a regular jolly old-fashioned cry over it—Elsie, Arthur's a dear good fellow.—And you and I can be married together. We've always been sisters, ever since we've known each other. And now we'll be sisters even more than ever.'

THE END.

THE OPAL MOUNTAIN OF FAROE.

STROMOE, the chief of the Faroe Islands, is only about twenty-five miles long by six or seven in breadth; yet in its small area it includes two wonderful mountains. One of these is known as the Opal Mountain, because it contains much precious stone of the opal kind. The other is the Myling Head precipice, a headland two thousand two hundred feet above the sea-level, and perpendicular. Humboldt, the great traveller, has pointed out how very rarely this or that rock with a reputation for perpendicularity is really perpendicular. But the Myling Head mountain positively hangs over the sea at its summit, so that you may watch the waves beating its base half a mile beneath you.

With the intention of visiting these two phenomena of nature, the writer left Thorshavn, the capital of the Faroes, one August morning. One can never depend on Faroe weather; and though at the time I started from the steep stony little streets of the town the sun was bright over the sea, and a brisk north wind was blowing, ere I got to Kollefjord the whole land might be bathed in fog. However, the weather kept good, and so I did not lose my way in the bogs and mountain uplands between Thorshavn and Kollefjord. Eight hours of soft and hard going had made me tired enough by the time I was skirting the blue waters of the fiord towards my destination for the night. I passed several knots of Kollefjord-men in their red caps, lounging by the water-side, or getting into their boats for the evening fishing. They were astounded to see a stranger, and stopped singing until I was out of sight.

At about seven o'clock I reached the farm to which I bore a letter of introduction. A man who spoke excellent English had joined me in the valley. From sheer love of England and the English, he assured me, it would delight him to interpret between me and the bonder. He had fished for several years at Grimsby, and served on a Scotch smack; but the needs of an old mother, and an increasing family of his own, had tied him to Faroe for the last five years.

We halted at the door of a house fronting some haybeds—the Faroe cultivable patches are small and rectangular, and environed by trenches: literal beds—which sloped to the water's edge about two hundred yards distant. On the grass in front, a number of fleeces were spread to dry, and home-spun jerseys of blue, crimson, green, yellow, and white wool. A rush of dogs ensued; several light-haired sturdy boys and girls followed the dogs, and then uprose a cry of 'Fader! Fader!' One of the most perfect conceivable specimens of stalwart humanity strode out of the house in response to this cry, and accosted my guide. In his hands was a part of a cow's skin, out of which he had been employed in cutting a pair of moccasins; and he was redolent of the hay of his own

beds before us. No sooner did the farmer understand that he was called upon to receive a guest, than his fine hearty face flushed with elation. He lifted his turban with exquisite rare courtesy, and bowed his great body a quarter of its height from the ground. From my shoulders he unstrapped the knapsack with nervous haste, and then showed the way into his house, and besought me to take a seat in the *rogstue* (kitchen), where half a score of perturbed men and women were grouped about the fire. But I had scarcely entered the room when the lady of the house hurried after me, and with smiles of cordiality and vociferous upbraidings of her husband for blundering so obtusely, bowed me out of it, and into the guest-room proper.

On such short notice and at such a time of day, would she take me in? I asked.

But there was positive reproach in the worthy woman's tone and face when she asked in reply if it were likely she should do otherwise. There were others in Siov who would be only too ready to receive a stranger; but I had been recommended to her care, and she hoped I would confide in her. The best of everything in the house should be at my service, from the best feather-bed, over and under, to the best silver and the largest eggs; and her man himself should accompany me up the Opal Mountain, out to the fishing, or anywhere else whither I might require him. She herself would forthwith prepare supper, if I would tell her what I liked best.

Before leaving me, she uncovered and opened the window of the room. The scent of new-cut hay came in straightway with a light breeze from the sea. The evening shadows were creeping over the still fiord; but there were spaces of sunlight on the gray rocks which rose steeply a thousand feet or more from the water's edge on the other side; while at the end of the valley the summit of great Skelling himself (the highest mountain of Stromoe), dead dark as to his lower parts, was swathed in a thick fold of white cloud. It was a scene of beauty and tranquillity; and the slow chant of some home-returning fishermen, with the faint rhythmic splash of their oars, came through the air, softened to solemnity.

'And the weather?' I asked of my jovial host during supper.

'Not so good,' said he. 'One day, good weather—not two.—But if you will ascend the mountain to look for the stones, it will not matter very much what the weather may be.'

Yes; I was determined to climb Odnadalstind (the Opal Mountain) on the morrow, and see if I could not find an opal worth carrying away: this, with the help of a dictionary, I made him understand. And then, for my encouragement, he told me that not long ago a gentleman of Westmannhavn (on the west coast of Stromoe) had picked up in the neighbourhood a superb stone worth many hundreds of crowns. Nothing could be easier than to make the ascent—under his guidance. He knew all the likely places; indeed, no one else had any business to know them. It was his own mountain, or rather his as the king's deputy; and for it he paid the king a hundred crowns rental. It gave grazing to eightscore sheep, a few cows and a bull, and living-room to sundry droves of geese which liked the breezy uplands; there were hares on it and some snipe:

and this, with what he got by selling his bits of opal to Copenhagen jewellers, surely made up a fair equivalent for the hundred crowns. Moreover, it was the third highest mountain in Faroe, and this was an additional feather in the cap of the good man's pride.

Oh yes! if he was to let go the mountain, which had come to him from his father and his father's father to the sixth generation, there were many Faroe people who would be glad enough to lease it at the same price—if they could get it. But the mountain would probably stay in the Johanneson family as long as Denmark was a monarchy. 'For'—with a look of approval at his wife—'there were two young boys born to him already, and both were sound in limb and wind.' The bonder had married twice; and my hostess, his second wife, and mother of the boys, was sister to his first wife. Such second alliances are much fancied in Faroe.

After supper, the good people left me to myself. It is not customary for the Faroese to use artificial light in summer; but they brought me their best winter's lamp, and then genially wished me good-night (*soo vel*). The bonder went to make me a pair of cowskin moccasins for the mountain climb; for, though he had unbounded admiration for my English boots, he considered them unfit for the wet and rocky surface of the Faroes.

A word about the room in which I was installed here at Siov, and which was fairly typical of the average guest-chamber of a Faroe farmhouse. It was wholly of wood, and clean in every part. The ceiling was so low that the antique gun which hung across it could be reached with ease. In one corner of the room was a sewing-machine; for my hostess was an expert dressmaker, having lived many years in Copenhagen. In another, two chests of drawers were set on end, forming an imposing piece of furniture which touched the ceiling. The third corner was occupied by a cupboard with a glass door, within which the family plate and china were displayed with some little ornamental skill. A sofa stuffed with soft straw stretched athwart one side of the room; and three or four heavy, hard, unpolished chairs were disposed about it. A couple of tables and a noisy clock made up the run of the furniture proper; though in the window there were some plants, existing, not flourishing; and on the walls were an oval gilt mirror, and a picture showing the silhouette heads and busts of three gentlemen (ancestors of my hostess), with plenty of hair, and noses of remarkable and varied developments. From the guest-room a little door allowed ingress to the bedchamber, which just held a bed.

The next day broke lethargically, and it was early apparent that the bonder was an experienced meteorologist. A dense fog pervaded all the valley. It was the phenomenon called by the Faroese *Pollamjörki* (from the Norwegian *Poll*, a little circular channel, and *mjörki*, a fog), inasmuch as it did not cover the tops of the mountains, which stood up from it like weird black trunkless giants. And when the sun came out and shone on the mountain-tops, making them lustrous through the lower mist, the effect was very eccentric. But, a little later, *Pollamjörki* changed to *mjörki* proper, which is a more unwelcome visitation. The fog rolled itself up, as it

were, and ascended the hillsides in eddying masses. Soon all the summits were wholly hidden, and their bases also, save for a few dozen yards, and the valley was filled with a light white mist. It seemed the most hopeless of days for mountain climbing, and I was quite prepared for a negative from the bonder. But, to my joy, he expressed contempt for the weather. He came in to me with my cowskin shoes in one hand, and a massy chisel and hammer gripped in the other, and his hearty face was red with the washing he had just bestowed on it in the cold mountain stream outside his door.

Odnadalstind is a mountain very conspicuous from the southern part of Stromoe. Its shape is that of a well-formed isosceles triangle, on the apex of which is a mass of rock congestion rising to a very limited actual peak. From Siov the ascent is easy, though in places the cliffs overhang in a rather troublesome manner. Only at the summit is there anything that need vex a nervous head. Here, however, for forty or fifty feet, the crags rise precipitously, and a firm but dainty tread is necessary in the climb. As for the view from the summit, it is said to surpass that of Skelling or Slatteritind (Faroe's king, 2890 feet, in Osteroe). Most of the Faroes are discernible from it. But of this, alas! I can say nothing, for the fog was persistent in its intervention between us and the land or sea level, though above us the sun shone with a tantalising brilliancy. From spaces of boulder-strewn heather we passed to steep inclines of broken rock; thence to much moss, wet with the saturation of subterfluent springs; and finally a long toil up a slope of painful shale brought us to the foot of the peak. A great bow of light cleft the fog just as we attained the summit, and seemed to augur a clearance; but this fog-bow was only a momentary though charming illumination.

Once we were on the summit of his mountain, the good bonder began to be patently oppressed by the cares of responsibility. He showed a solicitude for my safety that, howsoever laudable, was very ridiculous. By gestures rather than speech—for his language could not rise to the occasion—he gave me to understand the awful nature of the abysses on either hand falling from the foot of Odnadalstind's crest; and at first his hands flew to my neck or my arm if I did but move an inch, and he gripped like a vice. But he became more reasonable as he got accustomed to the position. However, for all we saw, we might as well have left Odnadalstind alone. From the north-east valley, whither the mountain-side fell very abruptly, came the deep roar of many fosses, subdued maybe by the fog, but still impressive; while, as if in contrast, the lowing of a single cow on the south-west side of the mountain also came to us, though infinitely lessened. The waterfalls were nothing to my guide; but when the cow lowed, he looked intelligent, and at the repetition of the sound he pricked up his ears, and informed me that it was Christina, one of his own beasts.

By this it was time to look after the opals. We had already tapped certain of the rocks during the ascent, though not in earnest. But now, beaded as to our noses, beards, and ears with fog-drops, we made our way to the site reputed most prolific in precious stones, and, in grim

sincerity, fell under the sway of jewel-fever. On our hands and knees we groped excitedly over the boulders, pulling away the moss, heather, and soil to seek those splits in the porphyry indicative of the latent existence of the stones, the more energetic parts of which were thus bursting towards the light. And, thanks to the knowledge of Johanneson, we were very soon upon the track of some promising stones. Between the boulders, where the downflow of accumulated rains had carried the earth, we espied a number of ruby particles. Digging, we discovered larger fragments; and, later, having followed the course of these minuter bits, we arrived at the block itself which by disintegration was enriching the lower soil. Here, then, the hammer and chisel came prominently into use.

Tons upon tons of the native porphyry in this locality were specked and flaked with opaline substances, and tiny jewels of very engaging colours: rich claret, clear yellow, and red-brown, flesh, milk-white, and gray. It seemed to my ignorant eyes that we were destined inevitably to release just as many stones as we pleased. But, alas, hope after hope was crushed when the hammer and chisel were brought into play. In the first place, the matrix was terribly hard; and secondly, when it did yield to Johanneson's sturdy blows, the stones embedded in it, and which had formerly looked so fine, were with it shattered all to pieces. Or when, by good luck, they came out unblemished, they proved of no depth: opaque, and therefore valueless: mere 'lamine.'

'No, no; you must not blame my mountain,' said the bonder, when a strong exclamation of disappointment had come from me: an iridescent stone like a cat's-eye had just broken asunder without the least encouragement. 'It is the way they go always; and I can tell you it asks much time and work with the chisel to gather ten opals, for which I receive one crown [thirteenpence-halfpenny] each from the Copenhagen merchants.'

I suggested an investment in dynamite as likely to be lucrative. But the bonder, when he began to understand the nature of the explosive, assumed an aghast countenance. What would become of his mountain, for which he paid the king yearly a hundred crowns, if once such a fell substance were introduced to it? And besides, it was very clear to him that the jewels would be as little likely as himself to favour the stuff: they would split, one and all, with their mother-rock. Indeed, such a train of possible evils occurred to the imagination of the bonder—for example, the destruction of his sheep and his geese, the deterioration of Christina's milk, the flight in terror of the seabirds for miles in the vicinity—that I was forced to join issue with him, and demonstrate the unlikelihood of dynamite ever being brought into common use in the Faroes. Then, in part comforted, he resumed the search for opals.

Eventually, after four or five hours' incessant labour, digging and hammering, bathed in the eternal fog all the time, we filled our pockets with jewels in better or worse condition, and for the most part environed with a lump of the hard porphyry matrix. The bonder said it was no bad day's work. But when, that evening, we submitted all our treasure to the criticism of an expert who lived in the valley, he shook his

head and pronounced sentence: 'No good!' No good, that is, as jewels: no jeweller would buy the stones for setting. On the other hand, as mere specimens, pretty and suggestive, they were very good.

On the way down, the bonder took me aside to a ledge of rock which had evidently been prospected and worked already. It was his prime depot, and he could not subject it to any dilatory mutilation. The porphyry rose in irregular tiers, two or three feet between each tier; and down its entire length ran a bright line of yellow jewel substance, which sparkled gaily through the thick atmosphere. On either side of it the rock had sprung, and the marks of Johanneson's hammer and chisel on previous occasions were very visible. He contemplated this valuable fissure with fixed eyes and swelled red cheeks; when he spoke of it, his voice was tremulous; and I could see his fingers tightening round his implements, as though they itched to be employed in real profitable toil. But with an effort he broke away from the place.

That evening I asked the good bonder how he contrived to keep such a property as Odnadalstind from despoliation.

'It is not kept so,' he exclaimed warmly. 'They go up when no one knows, and they take the stones without being allowed. And there is many a man and woman in Kollefjord who gets finer opals than I do, for all it is my own mountain, and was my father's and grandfather's before me. And when they show the stones, they say they picked them up in the valley. But it is all one lie: there is only one real opal mountain in all Faroe, and that is Odnadalstind.'

On the third day I said 'Good-bye' to my kind hosts. They could not have done more for King Christian himself than they did for me, a perfect stranger. And though I strove my utmost to convince them that by thus entertaining me with their best as a free gift they were positively wronging themselves and their children, I could not on this occasion induce them to take any money from me. Nor would they even receive thanks for their hospitality without a protest that they had done nothing deserving of thanks. The favour, they said, was on my side, not theirs. In fact, to my mind these honest, generous north-countrymen were much more interesting than the mountain of Odnadalstind, with all its hidden treasure.

MR ESHOLT'S YOUNG WIFE.

A STORY IN TWELVE CHAPTERS.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

THE date was a certain 3d of July when the present century was some forty years younger than it is now. The moon was rising in unclouded brightness when Miss Maria Granby, having seen that the preparations for supper were duly completed, entered the drawing-room, carrying a lighted lamp in her hand, and then, to her surprise, perceived that the vicar was sitting alone in the dusk.

'Dear me, brother, where can Agnes and

Wilmot have run off to?' she said. 'I left them sitting on the sofa not a quarter of an hour ago, and now'—

'I don't know, I'm sure, my dear,' replied Mr Granby, rousing himself from one of those reveries which of late had become habitual with him. 'I was under the impression that they were sitting there still.'

Miss Granby without more ado took up the skirts of her dress and passed through one of the French-windows, determined to go in quest of the missing ones. 'Surely,' she said to herself, as she returned for her pattens, for which old-fashioned articles she entertained a private predilection, as being good for the constitution in damp weather—'surely Wilmot can never have been foolish enough to trail that girl down to the river and the grass as wet as it is!' With that she clumped away through the moist shrubbery, accompanied by Tiny, a favourite cat, who, being in a moonstruck mood, bounded on with elevated tail in front of her mistress, and then stopping to munch grass till she came up, rubbed against her feet, gave utterance to a plaintive mew, and scampered off as before.

Mr Granby, sitting with a faint smile hovering round his mouth, and one finger inserted between the leaves of a calf-bound volume of sermons, was left alone in the lamp-lighted room.

Meanwhile, the fugitives had wandered slowly through the meadow which skirted the vicarage garden, and now stood, two lithe and youthful figures, watching the 'gleaming river seaward flow from the inner land,' and listening to its dreamy slumberous murmur, but with very opposite feelings. To the ears of the girl it sounded like a mournful valediction whispered by the water-sprites, for she and Wilmot were to part to-night, and her sinking heart responded 'farewell,' and tears sprang to her eyes, so that the moon looked blurred and dim. To Wilmot Burrell it sounded like the far-off murmur of the distant ocean over whose waters he was so soon to wander; and if any thought of his approaching separation from her he loved, or believed he loved, crossed his mind, it was but as a transient shadow which left no impression behind. 'You'll think of me sometimes when I'm far away, won't you, darling?' he asked as he drew Agnes's arm closer within his own and turned towards the house.

'How can you ask!' she said with a trembling voice in which there was a faint ring of reproach. 'You know that I shall think of you very, very often.'

'I knew you would before I asked; but I can't have the sweet assurance too often from your lips.'—Then to himself: 'Confound it all! I quite forgot to call at the *Red Lion* this afternoon for that half-box of Cubas which the landlord promised me. It's an awful nuisance. Too late now, of course, to fetch it.'

They paced in silence for a little while, then Wilmot said: 'And you'll write me lots of letters, won't you, dear? Never mind my short

ones. You don't know under what disadvantages a fellow writes on board ship—so much to distract his attention—so many duties to attend to—so little time to himself, that it's almost Love's labour lost to attempt it.—Why, you are quite melancholy to-night. Cheer up, little one. Two years will soon pass away, and then— But here comes aunty in search of us, so now we may look out for squalls.'

But Wilmot was mistaken, for Miss Maria, who would probably at any other time have scolded them as heartily as she knew how, which at the best was but poorly, remembering that he had but two more hours to stay with them, was too much melted by the thought to be more than mildly cross, and was, indeed, more inclined for tears than aught else. 'Come in, you foolish children, do!' she exclaimed with a little quaver in her voice. 'You will catch your deaths of cold, and supper will be quite spoiled—though neither of you deserves any, after running away in this fashion.'

'Don't say that, *ma chère marraine*,' replied Wilmot gaily. Then with a sigh, which, however, had nothing of sadness in it: 'Ah! many's the rough supper I shall have before I set eyes on either of you again.'

On reaching the vicarage they found Mr Granby slowly pacing the room with his hands behind him—a tall, fine-looking old man, but with an indefinable something in his expression which seemed to betoken a certain vacillation of purpose and infirmity of will.

Supper was soon over, for they were all too preoccupied to eat much. At the conclusion of the meal, Mr Granby, having drawn the cork of a bottle of his choicest port, an operation he would entrust to no hands but his own, arose, glass in hand. 'I drink,' said he with much solemnity, pushing up his spectacles on his forehead, 'to the health of the son of my oldest friend—to Wilmot Burrell. May he have a safe and prosperous voyage, and may we all be here to receive him on his return!'

Wilmot made a neat, sailor-like speech in reply, in which, after referring to the days of his childhood, all the recollections of which, he said, had reference in a greater or lesser degree to the persons then present and to the old house in which they then were, he alluded briefly to the prospects of his manhood, and hoped, in conclusion, that a new and a sweeter tie would in a little while bind him still closer to those whom he had loved and honoured from his youth upward. There was a brief silent pause after he sat down, which was pregnant with pathos to all there except to the young man himself.

And now Miss Maria became restless and uneasy, referring frequently to the timepiece, and listening intently for the slightest noise from without, for fear Wilmot might miss the night-coach by which he was to travel, although quite aware that it was not due for another half-hour. Presently she left the room for the purpose of satisfying herself that Wilmot's luggage had been brought down into the hall and was all properly labelled. Then the vicar took up his soft felt hat and went for a moonlight stroll on the veranda, and the two young people were left alone.

'Let us go into the drawing-room,' said Wilmot. 'I want you to sing me *The Murmur of the Shell*

and one or two other favourites, which will haunt my memory when I am far away.'

So Agnes seated herself at the piano and began to sing, while Wilmot bent over her and turned the music. One of his hands rested caressingly on her shoulder, and now and then his lips lightly touched her hair. But before long the striking of the clock warned them that in ten minutes more the coach would be due, and the same warning note brought back the vicar and Miss Maria.

The latter brought with her a long worsted comforter of divers colours, her own handiwork, with which she proceeded to enwrap Wilmot's throat and chest, and succeeded in tying it in an inextricable knot behind, notwithstanding his laughing resistance and a pathetic request that she would not make such a 'guy' of him. Then the good old man drew Wilmot to his side on the sofa, and taking one of his hands in both his, he addressed to him a few last words of kindly counsel and admonition. The young man listened with downcast eyes and a half-smile, wondering within himself why elderly people should nearly always be so much more prosy and tiresome than young ones. It was a relief to him when the sound of the distant horn put an end to the vicar's monologue. Juxon, the vicar's man, had already wheeled the luggage to the gate, and our friends now followed it, Miss Maria with a little white shawl pinned over her faded curls, to keep the night-air off. As they walked down the garden path, she pressed into Wilmot's reluctant hand a silk purse of her own making—not an empty purse by any means. She was his godmother, and as he had lost both his parents when quite young, she had always looked upon him as being in some sort her own especial property. The coach came rattling up. There was a last hand-shake for the vicar, a hearty kiss for Miss Maria, a more lingering one, or it may be more than one, for Agnes, with a whispered, 'Do not forget me, darling, and write as often as you can;' and then Wilmot leaped blithely up beside the driver. A wave of the hand, a crack of the whip, a blast from the guard's bugle, and they were off—off, melting gradually into the summer darkness and seeming to become a portion of it, then detected by the ear alone, till that, too, failed and silence claimed its own again. Silently and sadly the three who were left went back to the house, over which a shadow seemed already to have fallen. Already they missed Wilmot's light-hearted laughter and the fresh brightness of his handsome face.

Little inclined for sleep was Agnes when she went to her own room. The moon threw its broad silver beams into her chamber, and the spirits of the night seemed to whisper sadly at the casement—one dear name. She blew out her candle and sat down on the low window-seat. All things spoke of him: the old summer-house, dimly discerned, where they had spent so many happy hours; the quivering poplars, up which he had climbed when a boy; the distant river, on whose banks they had so often wandered. She gazed and gazed, immersed in a thousand memories, till she lost all sense of time and place. Her spirit flew forth into the night to embrace him, pursuing him, swift as Ariel's self,

along the road he had gone. And not on that night alone, but on many after nights, when the winds were high and the black waters troubled, did she wander forth in fancy through the waste of darkness in search of him she had lost.

Wilmot, meanwhile, was being whirled rapidly along towards his destination. He happened to be the only outside passenger, and in ten minutes after taking the box-seat he and the driver had become the best of friends. Both driver and guard must help themselves out of his cigar case, and as often as they stopped to change horses, each of them must have a glass of 'something hot' at his expense. Wilmot dearly loved to play the part of Don Magnifico in his little way.

The coach drew up in Dale Street, Liverpool, next morning as the clocks were striking six, by which time the young man was pretty well 'slewed up' as he termed it; so he made his way at once to the *Crooked Billet* in Exchange Street East, where he ordered a bed and slept till four o'clock in the afternoon. He arose in the best possible humour with himself and everybody. He had examined the contents of Miss Maria's purse, which proved more valuable than he had expected; so, as he was to sail in the course of a few days and could not make sure of another evening to himself, he decided to seek out a couple of friends, whom he would treat to a first-rate dinner and a box at the theatre afterwards. Hang the expense! the little purse would stand it all.

He had not forgotten Agnes—by no means. He often thought of her, and always with a little self-satisfied smile playing round his mouth. By Jove! what a lucky fellow he was. Here was a girl, as pretty as you would see in a day's walk, who loved him with all the fervour of her fresh young heart, and had promised to wait till he should be in a position to marry her—a girl with good expectations, too, which made matters all the pleasanter. What with his living and his private income, the old vicar must be decidedly 'warm,' and he did not look like a man who would trouble this world many years longer. Wilmot Burrell felt that he would have given much for a peep at Mr Granby's banking account.

THE RAT.

THE rat has earned for himself the reputation of being one of the most sagacious of four-footed creatures; and we are of opinion that he has fairly earned it. That he is exceedingly sharp and cunning, we have had manifold opportunities of proving to our cost. Not seldom have we found, when he was bent on evil courses, that it took us all our time to outmanoeuvre him, and sometimes we have been compelled to acknowledge defeat.

We live in the country, where we cultivate a small farm; and the outhouse premises, drains, hedgerows, and shrubbery close by have been found comfortable homes and convenient shelters for these destructive rodents. Sometimes they literally swarm everywhere; sometimes very few are about; and on several occasions we have

been successful in banishing them altogether for several months. From what we have observed, we cannot doubt that it is not an unusual thing for them, when the conditions of life are adverse, to change their quarters *en masse*. And this is not always explainable on the ground of a failure of food supplies; rather some grand catastrophe, or the anticipation of it, would appear to be the cause of migration. One time a fire had been kindled under a boiler in an outhouse. A big rat had evidently been prowling about, and had sought temporary refuge and concealment in the smoke-flue. Very soon, however, he found his hiding-place getting too warm for him; the heat forced him to attempt an escape; but the only possible outlet was through the rapidly kindling flames. It had to be done, however; and at last he made the rush, right through the fire and smoke, and escaped. We cannot say whether he was badly burned or only slightly singed, or if he survived the fiery ordeal; but certain it is from that day for fully six months not a rat was seen or known to be about the premises. This would also go far to prove the accuracy of the observation often made, that rats are so afraid of fire, that even the smell of singeing will terrify them into 'making tracks.'

On another occasion we got quit of an army of these troublesome neighbours in a curious way. They had drilled a hole in an outhouse floor just over a cross rafter beam. This opened a passage to the granary, and they were obviously having fine times of it amongst the grain. Our boy dearly loves the hunt and sport of every description, and he is withal of a very ingenious turn of mind. Here was an opportunity for displaying his inventive genius, which he determined to improve. Hearing us make some hostile remarks about the thieves, he carefully examined the hole; then came to us with a very determined air and said: 'Father, the first rat that dares to come through that hole shall die; you see if he doesn't. And if he is the father of all the rats, teaching the others to steal, which is most likely, all the better.'

'Very well,' said I, highly amused. 'Try what you can do; but most probably you will be defeated. The rats are very cunning animals.'

'I know they are,' was the prompt reply; 'but I am cunning too.'

He did not tell us his plan: he was going to surprise us; and feeling himself put upon his mettle by our bantering challenge, he was determined not to be baffled. This was how he set to work. To one end of a piece of lancewood about two feet long—the remains of a broken bow—he firmly attached, at right angles, a short skewer, sharpened to a fine point. The other end of the lancewood he nailed securely to the floor—thus extemporising a sort of spring of sufficient strength and elasticity for his purpose. The point of his arrow he supported right above the rat-hole by a little bit of loose wood an inch broad, in such a way that there was no possibility of a rat crossing the beam or coming up through the hole without displacing this supporting pin and freeing the arrow, which the elasticity of the bow would drive home, and so slay any rat that might be foolhardy enough to dare the passage. All being carefully arranged and fixed up before evening, the result was

watched and waited for with intense interest, the proceedings being in the meantime kept a secret from us. Some little time after darkness had fallen, we were sitting in our room reading, when our boy rushed in, in a state of frantic excitement, and a little pale, we thought.—‘The rat!’ he cried. ‘Come, quick, quick! I don’t know what to do.’

We followed him with a lantern; and there, sure enough, was a monstrous fellow transfixed to the beam, and screaming fearfully in his agony. We felt at a loss what to do. It was impossible to haul him out and despatch him. But we could not bear to hear the pitiful cries of the writhing prisoner, so we hurriedly pulled up the skewer, and he disappeared. As far as we could judge, he had been pierced through one of his hind-legs. Whether or not the wound proved mortal, we could not tell; but we came to the conclusion that he must have been a leading and influential member of the tribe, and doubtless advised a change to safer quarters; for not a rat troubled us for months after that, and our young hopeful was abundantly satisfied with the result of his stratagem.

Rats are certainly very destructive to grain both in stack and in the granary; but their ravages amongst young poultry are more obtrusively apparent, and consequently more provoking. We have observed, however, that some seasons, although they are known to be numerous about the premises, they don’t attack the young birds; while at other times their persistent onslaughts render it exceedingly difficult to rear a single brood without half or all of it falling a prey to their voracity. We take it that, birds not being their natural food, they don’t always find out they are so easily killed, and withal so toothsome; but when some old and powerful chief of the tribe, perhaps half accidentally, through falling in with a dead or weakly bird, makes the discovery, the rest follow his lead in the work of slaughter; and then the broods are despatched without stint or mercy. It is curious that the mother-bird seems to be no protection whatever. She will fly furiously at dogs or cats, if they come near or attempt to molest her; and she will with great courage—as we have more than once witnessed—repulse the attacks of hooded crows and even ravens. But the rats don’t mind her a bit; at anyrate, they are not beat off by her, but carry on their depredations in contempt of her. And yet one would think a hen’s powerful beak might prove a not ineffective defence if properly used.

As a general rule, dogs and cats are not of much use in destroying these pests. We have a fine Skye terrier with a splendid nose for rats, and inspired with a great love of sport. The hens’ court is surrounded by a tall thick hedge, at the roots of which there are not a few rat-holes. Master ‘Scamp’ is aware of this, and often watches for the ‘varmin’ for hours after the manner of cats. Occasionally, he is successful when some enterprising rat ventures forth to claim a share of the hens’ food or of pickings that may be scattered about; but generally, the cunning rat makes sure, even if at some distance from his hole, to be near enough the hedge to secure a safe retreat. On the least alarm or movement, if he cannot reach his hole, he rushes to the hedge and runs up into the branches, where he hides amongst the leaves, and

can laugh at Scamp’s furious barking and challenge to come down if he dares; and he takes good care not to leave his place of safety and concealment until the coast is clear.

As to cats, some of them are good ratters, and when they are, they are invaluable; but, as a general rule, they will scarcely look at a rat, and evidently don’t regard them as their proper prey. A short time ago we witnessed, at a friend’s house, a curious incident, illustrative of the sagacity and prompt fertility of resource of a grand old rat. He had somehow got into a large empty barrel, but could not leap out, and had not had time to gnaw his way out before he was discovered. My friend had a fine large cat, ‘Muffin,’ a capital mouser, but not a ratter. Here, thought Mr B—, was a fine opportunity of forcing on the combat; and perhaps, if Muffin once got a lesson, he might develop a taste for rat-hunting; so he was dropt into the barrel. Manifestly, however, he did not approve of this mode of procedure, and sprang upwards. The old rat was equal to the occasion. Muffin’s forepaws had scarcely touched the edge of the barrel, when, quick as thought, and with admirable promptitude, he made a spring on to Muffin’s back, and ran right over him; and would to a certainty have escaped but for another enemy close by in the shape of a great St Bernard dog that was sitting watching the proceedings with interest. Right into his capacious jaws the unfortunate rat leaped, and there was of course an immediate end of him. That rat deserved a better fate.

We have tried every description of rat-trap we could lay hands on, but have found them all unsatisfactory. Occasionally, a single rat may be caught; but the others take note, and are not to be tempted by the most seductive bait; nor are their suspicions lulled by very cunning devices. We have set traps carefully concealed round the outlet of their holes in such a manner that we did not think it possible they could pass without being caught. But somehow they did; or they had some other outlet which they utilised.

Last year we were fairly put on our mettle. We had a fine brood of valuable chickens which we were watching and cherishing with great solicitude. They were about three weeks old. No attack had been made upon them, and we were in hopes it was going to prove a season of exemption. We were rudely awakened from our pleasant dreams. One morning five of our best chickens had disappeared. Our old enemies, we found, had been at work and begun their depredations. They had gained access by scraping a hole in the hard soil under the edge of the coop. It was plain we must devise some means of excluding the robbers. Meantime, we transferred ‘Amelia,’ the mother-hen, and the remainder of her brood to a small outhouse, to which there was no access even for a rat, and locked the door, which was strong and closely fitted. What was our dismay next morning to find the audacious burglars had with their sharp teeth drilled a hole through the door at one corner and devoured or mangled every one of the chickens! Amelia was left lamenting. We were thoroughly roused. In our wrath we vowed vengeance, and resolved it should be such as would teach the tribe a lesson they would not soon forget. Long we

pondered over the situation. All ordinary methods, we knew, would prove of little avail. We must try something novel; we must invent a new species of trap more deadly than any with which we were acquainted.

We shall endeavour to describe our invention and the plan we adopted. We made a narrow box just long enough to reach across the top of an empty herring-barrel, and about eight inches broad, and the same deep. The lid of the box we nailed down, except eight inches at one end, which was open. Right underneath this opening, and of the same size, we fitted a sort of trap-door, adjusted with a species of pivot hinge, balanced in such a way that it yielded to the slightest weight when dropt on it, but immediately returned to its level position. Our object will be apparent. The rats must not suspect that this part of the bottom of the box was less secure than it seemed, until they sprang down on it and found out, when too late, its treacherousness. At one end of our stable there is a loose horse-box, seldom used, except by the rats, which find it a convenient place for holding their midnight revels, and from the manger of which, on the approach of danger, they have an easy passage to a loft and to their secret and safe retreats. Here, close to the manger, we set the barrel, into which we poured a couple of buckets of water. We then adjusted the box, nailing pieces of board at both its sides across the uncovered top of the barrel, to hide the inside from the keen eyes of our destined victims. Thoroughly to lull their suspicions, we judged it expedient to bolt up the trap-door and feed them for a few days. We therefore put into the box a goodly supply of highly flavoured viands peculiarly tempting to rat palates—bits of old cheese, fat of roast beef, and such-like.

For five days they were proof against the temptation, and we had almost begun to fear we were going to be balked. However, we waited patiently, and on the sixth morning we were not a little satisfied to find that all the contents of our box had disappeared. We suppose the wary old members of the tribe regarded the whole apparatus with suspicion, and declined a closer inspection, lest they should come to grief, until some adventurous young brave led the way. Finding he came to no mishap, and all being apparently quite safe, the others would follow. For several days we still continued to introduce into the box fresh supplies of food, which each morning disappeared. When we were satisfied that all suspicions were completely lulled, we drew the bolt of the trap-door and anxiously awaited the result. Next morning, we had the pleasure of fishing up no fewer than twenty-two rats of various sizes which had found a watery grave in the barrel. Dead rats tell no tales; and the survivors, although they might, and no doubt did, miss their companions which had so miserably perished, could not see, and apparently did not understand, the manner or cause of their disappearance, and did not suspect, until too late, the little box from which they had enjoyed so many delightful feasts. Two days afterwards we found that twelve more had made the grand plunge which had proved so fatal to their kindred. We don't suppose the whole colony was extirpated; we daresay a few survived; but they seemed to have been so struck with terror at the dreadful mystery of the disaster

which had befallen the tribe, that they made tracks, and we were no more troubled with them for the rest of the season. Amelia was amply avenged, and so were we.

WHO DID IT?

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

MARY returned early from the cricket-field, for her uncle might come back at any moment, and she knew that it irritated and put him out to find the house empty. He had not, however, returned, so she seated herself at the window, which looked over the neglected expanse of a once pleasant lawn, bounded by a ruddy old wall, about which clambered in unkempt profusion plums and pears and nectarines, and reviewed the events which were taking place in her little world. The result of an hour's meditation over Claude's not unnatural impatience and disappointment, and the state of affairs between her uncle and her brother, so evidently getting from bad to worse, was that she had a good cry, and was found with her face buried in her hands by Dick on his return from the match.

'Well,' she said with assumed sprightliness, 'and who won?'

'Oh, we beat 'em by five wickets.—You didn't see my smack, did you?'

'Your smack, Dick? Why, you haven't been hurt, have you?' asked Mary anxiously.

'No, no; I mean my hit. You know that the wickets were pitched closer up to the garden wall than usual. Well, they put on slows, and I got a half-volley to square leg which I couldn't resist, so I put all my beef into it and sent the ball spinning away over the wall. "Lost ball" of course it was, and I got six for it, for you might look for a week in the garden without finding a cricket ball.—Where's the old man?'

'He has not come back yet, and I'm getting anxious.'

'Oh, he's all right,' said her brother. 'Why, he'd stay away for a week on the chance of finding a lot of dirty old stones or a bit of broken pottery. Besides, he often goes away, stays later than he intended, and puts up at some fellow's house for the night.—But what are you crying about?'

'I'm not crying, Dick.'

'I'll swear you were when I came in, and your eyes are red now.'

'Oh, I think I'm a little put out, and perhaps I'm anxious about uncle—that's all.'

'Not you. That beggar Shute's been here. Lucky I wasn't in.'

'I think you are very unkind and unjust about "that beggar Shute," as you are pleased to call him; and I'm sure I don't know why.'

'Because I hate fellows of his kidney, poor as church mice, who come sponging and sneaking and cadging about for what they can get. He's already got round the old man, and he's got round you, and he's only got to get round me, and his artful game is won.—Now, if it was a chap like Jack Straddles of Pommel Hall, I'd say

nothing. He's the sort of man I'd choose for a brother-in-law; and he'd stand on his head for a week, with a little encouragement from you.'

'Mr Straddles is not a man to my taste. He has only got two topics—sporting and stables.'

'And two very good topics they are; better than rhymes and old stones and nigger languages and that sort of thing. All I can say is that Shute shan't be your husband with my consent.'

Mary's heart was full, and she was longing to speak up in vindication of her lover; but she knew that it would not only be fruitless, but that it would serve to anger her hot-headed brother still more against him; so she remained silent.

As Dick insisted, they did not wait dinner, and had a silent, uncomfortable sort of meal together; Dick being rather ill at ease, because he was perhaps conscious of having talked too freely and violently upon a matter which in reality was but of little concern to him; Mary unsettled and anxious on account of her uncle.

'If he is not home soon,' she said in reply to her brother's exhortations not to be silly about nothing, 'I shall be sure that there is something wrong. I know that formerly he used sometimes to stay away at night without having given us notice, but that was when he was stronger, and he has not done it for at least a year.'

Dick sauntered away after dinner to play billiards with a neighbouring Squireen. Mary hurried off down to the railway station to inquire if her uncle had gone by train anywhere, for she knew that if he had done as he intended, gone with the antiquaries, the distance was too far for him to walk.

In reply to her question, the station-master said that he had only issued a ticket to one gentleman, and that was to Mr Shute, who had gone to London by the three o'clock train.

So she hastened homewards again; but her uncle had not returned, and as it was getting dark, her anxiety became more intense. He was an old man, and it was quite possible that in order to save the train-fare he might have attempted to walk the five miles to Bury Hill; and that, in such a lonely part of the country, he might have been seized with a fit or have broken a blood-vessel without any one being near to help him.

Remain in the house alone in company with these and other dreads of a similar character she could not, so she sent a servant with a message to Mr Richard that he should come home at once.

Half an hour elapsed before Dick arrived, and he was in no gentle mood at being disturbed in his evening's amusement for what he considered the foolish whim of a nervous girl.

'Dick,' said his sister, 'I am sure there is something wrong. Uncle has never been out so late before without letting us know. I've been to the station, and he hasn't been there. No one has seen him about the village.'

'Well then,' said Dick, 'if he didn't go with the antiquarian Johnnies, and hasn't taken the train, and hasn't been seen in the village, he's somewhere about the grounds: there's plenty of room for him on fifty acres of land.'

'Perhaps at the old summer-house,' said Mary. 'Yes, yes; Dick, let us go and look.'

'The last place in the world where he'd go when there was a cricket match going on,' said

Dick. 'Why, he always swears he can't read a line or think because of the noise.'

But Mary was so resolved to go and look, that Dick got a lantern, and with his sister close at his heels for fright and nervousness, led the way through the bushes and thick undergrowth, silent and weird in the faint sickly light of the rising moon, towards the old summer-house.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought them to the summer-house, a tumble-down, rickety old structure, standing on a small open space amidst the trees, and facing a quiet pool of dark water which extended as far as the boundary-wall, some thirty yards distant, long since abandoned to rats and bats, but by reason of its solitude, much frequented by old Jethro Seaton, who often passed the long hours of an entire summer day here in company with a favourite volume from the dusky, dusty shelves of his library. The place barely stood together, for the thatched roof had peeled off in a dozen places, and the rats had burrowed holes all about the flooring; but old Jethro would not have it touched—from sentiment, he said—from motives of parsimony, it was generally believed.

The ray of lantern light thrown into the building showed a dark mass on the floor. Mary uttered a cry of horror, and in a moment was kneeling beside the helpless body of her uncle. Dick stood like a man in a trance, his wide-open eyes fixed on the inert heap, the lantern trembling in his hands.

'Dick, Dick!' cried the girl. 'He may not be dead! You must get help! As quick as you can; there may be a chance.—O uncle! my dear old uncle!'

Dick placed his hand on the white cheek, and shook his head. 'There is no chance,' he said in a low voice; 'he is as cold as marble. He must have had a fit, poor old uncle, for he has fallen sideways from the chair.'

'Dick, Dick!' whispered the girl, seizing his hand, 'it is a dreadful thought, but do you think there has been any crime committed?'

'Crime! You mean do I think he has been murdered? Certainly not. What earthly object could any one have in murdering a poor old harmless man like uncle? However, you stay here. I'll leave the lantern; I can find my way back easily enough. I'll get some men to help us take him into the house, and then I'll go for Dr Waller: he'll say at once what has been the cause of death.' So he started off, leaving Mary moaning and crying by the side of the body, and in a very short time returned with a couple of men, by whose aid it was carried into the house.

The doctor examined the body, and could find no traces of violence; but when he came to the head, he pointed out the wound behind the ear, that must have been the result of a tremendous blow, sufficient, he said, to have killed instantaneously a much younger and stronger man. It had not been such a blow as would have been caused in falling, he said, but a deliberately aimed blow. 'In short,' he summed up, 'I am afraid there has been foul-play, and it will be my duty to communicate my suspicions at once to the police.'

'My God!' exclaimed Dick, 'and I quarrelled with him to the very last!'

And the stalwart young athlete, who had never

shed a tear since his mother's coffin had been carried out of the house, threw himself into a chair and sobbed bitterly.

Mary was calm and quiet in her grief; so calm and quiet that her brother was surprised.

'Mary,' said Dick presently, 'we must not leave a stone unturned to come at the root of this. Who could possibly have done this?'

Mary was looking at him with a strange questioning look. Then she took his arm, and said: 'Dick, it is a horrible question, but I must ask it. Do you know anything about this?'

'I! I!' almost shrieked the young man.—'Mary, do you mean to ask me if I have done this? Oh no, no! But I shall be suspected; I know that. Every one knows of the quarrels between me and my uncle. Every one knows that I have an uncontrollable temper, and they will say that we had a quarrel, and that I struck him dead! But Mary, although you do think so badly of me, you do not believe that I could be capable of such a deed? Say that you don't!'

'Of course I believe you, Dick, and I don't think badly of you, as you say; but the thought did flash across me that perhaps uncle had met you coming from cricket, had reproached you for having left business, and that you had replied, and—— But no, you *could* not have done it, I am sure.'

'It is too late now to think of searching,' said Dick; 'but to-morrow, as soon as it is light, I will go down to the summer-house and look for some evidence of the murderer. Anything will serve as a clue—footmarks, something dropped in the hurry of flight, the smallest clue will be sufficient. And yet I cannot conceive who could have anything to gain by murdering one who, strange and unpopular as he might have been, never did harm to any one. Gain could not have been the object, for poor old Uncle Jethro was too careful to go about with anything worth robbing about him except his watch. We shall find that in the summer-house, I have no doubt, for you know he always used to read with it placed on the table beside him.' So they took a parting look at the poor body stretched on the bed in his own room, and having, according to local custom, placed four candles lighted in the room, turned the pictures with their faces to the wall, and reversed the looking-glass, betook themselves to such sleep as they could snatch under such terrible circumstances.

But one face haunted Mary throughout that long night—the face was that of Claude Shute, and on the dark brow she saw the deep brand of Cain.

OPIUM 'JOINTS' IN THE BLACK HILLS.

IN 1877 and 1878, when Deadwood, the metropolis of the Black Hills, one of the richest mining camps ever discovered in the United States, was over three hundred miles distant from the nearest railroad, it was ascertained that the Chinamen had introduced the vice of opium-smoking among the white inhabitants. I was employed at the time as Deputy-Sheriff, and received instructions to investigate the subject, with a view of closing the houses and punishing the proprietors.

While so employed, I discovered that there were no fewer than ten houses where smoking was in-

dulged in, and that these houses would accommodate over two hundred smokers at one time.—During all hours of the day and night they were well patronised, and because of the rough character of the majority of the population, the Chinese proprietors made but very little effort to hide the real nature of their business, although here, in common with other sections of the States, the laws against this traffic were very severe, but had never been enforced. However, the better class of the inhabitants realised that some effort to stop the vice was necessary, because the proportion of regular smokers, or 'fiends' as we styled them, was becoming so large as to cause scandal even among the reckless adventurous spirits found in the population of a rich mining camp. It was then I first saw the interior of a 'joint,' and if your readers will for a short time accompany me in their imagination, I will describe it.

From the outside appearance of the frame building we are approaching, and the sign 'Sin Lee Laundry,' this is only one of the numerous Chinese laundries which are established by the Celestials in every mining camp in the West. We step from the street into a small room entirely unfurnished, except by a short pine-board counter, on which is a pair of scales for gold-dust, and the counting-board used by all the Chinese to assist them in figuring. A small saw-toothed, almond-eyed Chinaman, with his queue twisted around on the top of his head, and dressed in a gaily coloured quilted silk robe with wide-flowing sleeves, wide trousers, and shoes peculiar to this race of people, stands behind the primitive counter, ready to attend to the wants of customers. He is not the proprietor, as we ascertain by inquiring for Sin Lee, which provokes the response: 'Him not here. What you wantee?' This is in accordance with his instructions, for these Chinamen are very 'cute, and never acknowledge that they are the particular ones you want until they ascertain the nature of your business; and in keeping up such a mystery they are ably assisted by nature, for all the men bear such strong likeness to each other, that unless a white man is really well acquainted with the particular Chinaman he wants to see, it is almost impossible for him to pick him out of a crowd of them. But a sign being given, and a half-dollar or sack of gold-dust placed on the counter, our Celestial friend produces a card, on which he places a very small quantity of opium, and calls an attendant to conduct us to a smoke-room.

We step from the little front office through a doorway into a passage, from both sides of which open several small doors. One of these being opened by the attendant, we find ourselves in a room or stall about six feet wide and seven long, and although the ceiling is low, yet the partitions do not reach to it on either side. The walls, floor, and ceiling are all plain pine-boards; no paper-hanger, plasterer, or painter has ever tested his skill in any part of this house; no decorator or upholsterer has ever found his services needed to furnish this infamous den, presided over by as low a grade of Chinamen as ever landed on American soil. The only furniture in the stall the attendant has thrown open is a bench built the entire length of the room, about five feet wide and four feet from the floor; on this is stretched an old piece of carpet; in each corner

is a dirty pillow, which has the appearance of being stuffed with a block of wood; while in the centre of the bench stands a small lamp, with an opium pipe and piece of steel, which looks like a knitting-needle, lying beside it. There is no sign of a window in the room; no light can penetrate it except through the door in the passage. The smell of stale opium-smoke is sufficiently oppressive to give a novice such a fit of sickness as could hardly be excelled by the rolling of an ocean steamer in a stiff gale. No fresh air has ever mingled itself with the fumes; no ventilation or comfort is asked for by devotees to this vice; for old smokers have told me that the fascination is so great, that after smoking only a few times, they have found it almost impossible to break themselves of the habit, which in many cases mere curiosity caused them to form.

To the uninitiated, the opium pipe is a puzzle, for it has not any similarity to a tobacco pipe. The stem is about twenty-four inches long, and as thick as a medium-sized walking-stick; while the bowl of the ordinary pipe in this case presents a flat polished surface about an inch and a half in diameter, with a small hole in the centre. If the smoker is a novice, the attendant takes a reclining position on one side of the lamp, while the victim occupies a similar position on the other. Now we discover the use of the knitting-needle, for the Chinaman takes a certain quantity of the black gummy opium from the card on to the steel point; this he holds in the flame of the lamp, twirling the other end gently between his thumb and finger until the opium melts. Then he dexterously places the melted mass on the flat surface of the pipe, with the steel point in the hole in the centre. This is called 'rolling opium;' and regular frequenters of the 'joint' soon learn to roll for themselves as dexterously as the Chinamen. The pipe is then handed to the smoker, who proceeds to draw the fumes through the stem in the same manner that a man smokes a pipe full of tobacco, except that the bowl or flat surface on which the opium was placed has to be kept in the flame of the lamp to keep the drug alight. A few whiffs, and the rolling operation has to be gone through again; and a few pipes—unless the smoker be an old hand—will send him to sleep, and to dream, as some have described it, pleasant fairy-like dreams.

One initiated in this vicious habit can tell as soon as he sees the smoker take the first whiff whether he be a novice or a regular 'fiend.' The novice will draw in short whiffs quickly; but the old-timer takes what is known as the 'long draw;' in other words, draws slowly, and inhales the fumes through his entire system; at the same time his face wears such a satisfied look as to give an onlooker the impression that he is in an enviable state of bliss. Once asleep under the influence of this poisonous drug, the 'fiend' is allowed to occupy the stall until he awakes without interference. On awaking, his sensations are not so pleasant as they were; he feels a pricking through his entire body, as though some one was sticking pins into him by the thousand. If it has been his first experience, he is likely to feel very sick, as a man who has just awakened after a carousal on liquor; and if he is sensible, he will never again 'hit the pipe,'

as is the expression used. But if he is a regular 'fiend,' in a space of a few hours at most he will retrace his steps to the 'joint,' there to smoke himself again into a state of unconsciousness.

Let us take a further look through this establishment, where the Chinamen are getting rich, at the expense not only of the pockets but of the heart's-blood of their white neighbours. Stepping into the passage from our stall, and opening the other doors as we walk, we see in each room one, two, three, and sometimes four 'fiends' of both sexes, either dreaming off the effects of the deadly drug, or else smoking. So far as noise is concerned we might be in a vast tomb, for opium affects the brain in an entirely different manner from whisky, and the victims are entirely harmless. It quiets all the passions instead of inflaming them, and this is one of the reasons why opium-smoking can be carried on to such an extent without detection, for the older the smoker the more secretive he becomes; and the laws are now so strictly enforced all over this country, that it would be a most difficult matter to obtain a view of the interior of any smoke-house. Indeed, even in that far-away mining camp, and at that time, when the population were careless of such crimes as gambling and others against the morals of society, we virtually put a stop to this traffic in a short time; for when those ignorant of the terrible effects of the drug learned how quickly it would rob a man of all semblance of manhood, the officers received such assistance as frightened the Chinamen at least sufficiently to make them very secretive in conducting the business.

INVENTIONS IN GAUGING.

GAUGING, as every one knows, is the means of arriving at the approximate gross quantity or 'contents,' as it is called, of liquid in casks. To all brewers and distillers, and importers or exporters of beer, wines, and spirits, correct gauging is a matter of moment. The government gauger is the officer of customs or of excise whose duty it is to discover the contents of the casks of dutiable goods, with the object of assessing the amount of duty to be levied. A trifling error in the calculation, or, rather, in the system of calculation, means many thousands of pounds per annum out of the pockets either of the mercantile community or of the Crown. If the mode of calculation unduly favours the Crown, the merchants suffer, and *vice versa*. Hence, it is essential that the mode of gauging the contents of casks, by which so many millions of revenue are assessed, should be as far as possible strictly accurate. The safest plan to arrive at the quantity in any given cask would be to draw the contents off, and so measure them; but this is a tedious process, and is an impracticable one where tens of thousands of casks have to be dealt with. It is obvious, therefore, that some system of measurement must be adopted without reverting to the primitive one of drawing off the contents.

In the excise service, the measurement is arrived at by weighing the contents. The excise has mainly to deal with one item of spirit only, termed British Plain Spirits, consisting of home-manufactured gin or whisky or British brandy.

The goods to be assessed being home-manufactured, it is easy to ascertain the measurement of casks by weighing the empty casks; deducting this, the weight of full casks gives the required contents. But this cannot be done by the customs officers, who have to deal with casks of all sizes and construction imported from abroad. Knowing nothing whatever of the weight (or tare) of these casks of imported brandy, rum, geneva, plain spirits, and wines when empty, the customs department has perforce continued to use the recognised system of gauging by external wooden calipers, from which one inch is cut off—gauging officers having to supply differences according to the thickness of the cask or peculiarity of figure—the latter a geometrical allowance, in point of fact, for want of symmetry. Robert Burns himself gauged after this fashion. A rude attempt to allow for the ever-varying thickness of the heads of casks is made by causing the wooden calipers by which the officers take the lengths to show two inches less than the actual outside measurement. This arbitrary deduction of an inch from each head has to be revised by the guesswork of the gauger, who deems it sometimes necessary to greatly increase this allowance, and at other times actually to add to the length shown.

To obviate this chance-work, Mr Geo. D. Ham, a surveyor of the port of London, who has compiled several standard works on the customs and excise regulations for the revenue and mercantile communities, has just patented an ingenious invention for measuring the *internal* lengths of casks with absolute certainty by a rod or staff, which, when placed in the bung-hole of a cask, not only takes with absolute accuracy the exact internal length, and indicates it on the upper part, but actually registers it; so that at any time after he has withdrawn the rod, the gauging officer can, on referring to the instrument, see what is the length of the cask. The name given by the inventor to this instrument is Endometer (interior measurer); and this in conjunction with another invention of Mr Ham's—his Micrometer Compasses, which indicate the thickness of the long staves—will enable the heavy customs duties on foreign spirits to be assessed with an accuracy never before obtainable. The same ingenious officer has, after many years of patient experiment, improved the rule for making revenue calculations in regard to the ullage quantities—that is to say, the actual liquid quantity in casks not full. The quantity that a cask will hold when full—technically called the 'content'—is the basis for all subsequent calculation. As the casks remain in the warehouse they of course gradually become less and less full, and the quantity in a cask not full has hitherto been arrived at by a long and circuitous mode of double casting, supplemented by mental calculation. But Mr Ham's rule shows by one setting the exact ullage in the cask; and more than this, the same rule computes by one single setting the 'proof quantities'—that is, the standard or proof strength at which duties are charged and the revenue accounts kept.

As perhaps some of our readers may not understand what is meant by 'proof' quantities, we may observe that a certain mixture of alcohol constitutes what is termed 'proof'; and when the 'spirit'—brandy, gin, rum, &c., as the case may

be—does not contain this proportion of alcohol, it is termed 'under proof,' and an exactly corresponding deduction is made from the duty charged. On the other hand, if it contains more than the standard of strength, it is called 'over proof,' and charged accordingly. Thus, 100 liquid gallons at ten 'U.P.' are reckoned as 90 gallons; and on the other hand, some of the concentrated German spirit, now so extensively imported and, among other purposes, used largely for the adulteration of brandy, gin, rum, &c., is sixty-nine 'O.P.'—that is to say, 100 liquid gallons reckon and are charged as 169 proof gallons.

It is confidently expected that Mr Ham's inventions will revolutionise gauging. Whilst they are calculated to effect much saving in the time and labour of officers of customs and excise throughout the United Kingdom, their principal claim to consideration is that they will secure exactness in the assessment of revenue duties.

AUTUMN BLOOM.

YOUNG Spring had gone by blushing, and kind Summer
Had smiled and lingered, then gone out of sight;
When Autumn came, a wrinkled sad new-comer,
With dark eyes dimmed in Memory's misty light.

I sought the woods—the hawthorn leaves were sear;
The haws were plucked, or withering on the bough;
The blue-bell stems had fallen prone—How dear
Their beauty and their fragrance would be now!

Then o'er my soul swept great waves of self-pity:
'Why has my time for joyance come so late?
My summer stilled in the smoky city—
And now the flowers are dead! O cruel Fate!'

I sought my chamber. Rain came hurrying down—
Resistless rain, that hid the solemn hills,
And quenched the laughter of the little town.
Then grew I more content with all my ills,

As with faint water-colours day by day
A landscape blurred was sketched by the wild rain—
'The year and I have both grown old and gray;
No bud shall blush or bloom for us again!'

After a week, I lifted up my eyes;
The sun was shining, and I ventured forth
Down by the river. What was my surprise
To see a rosy blush there in the North

On Tinto's cheek! Old Tinto, that had stood
Black-browed and frowning all the summer o'er.
'Twas heather-bloom! Then thought I: 'God is good;
Even in Autumn there are joys in store.

'O heart, hard heart! put on thy Autumn glow
(A richer red after the rainy weather!);
Mourn not for Spring, for the lost Long-ago;
But clothe thy yawning clefts with honeyed heather.'

MARION.

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